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SPEECH

OF

JOHN BELL, OF TENNESSEE,

ON

SLAVERY IN THE UNITED STATES.

WASHINGTON:

GIDEON AND CO., PRINTERS.

1850.



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JOHN BELL, OF TENNESSEE,

ON

SLAVERY IN THE UNITED STATES,

AND

THE CAUSES OF THE PRESENT DISSENSIONS BETWEEN
THE NORTH AND THE SOUTH.

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DELIVERED IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES ON
THE 5TH AND 6TH OF JULY, 1850.

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TO MY FELLOW-CITIZENS OF TENNESSEE.

The following pages of a late speech, delivered in the Senate of the United States, contain matter which I have deemed worthy of a separate publication.

I can, with some confidence, commend not a casual reading only, but the study of the chain of facts presented, in the brief sketch I have attempted, of the party history of the country. If I am not greatly mistaken, the reader will find in those facts a sufficient and ample explanation of the causes of those dissensions between the North and the South which have given rise, of late, to such painful apprehension in the public mind; obstructed, for nine months, national legislation upon all other subjects of public concern, and brought the country to the verge of domestic convulsion.

The crisis is not past; nor can perfect harmony be restored to the country until the North shall cease to vex the South upon the subject of slavery; and that can never be, while the animating principal of party organization and cohesion continues without change or modification. The excesses to which the spirit of party and personal ambition, when most chastened, constantly tend in all popular governments, have always been regarded as the most formidable danger to which our system is exposed. This danger assumes a more serious and threatening aspect when, from the ignoble objects for which parties contend, they lose their dignity and degenerate into factions; but the danger becomes imminent and extreme when sectional interests—sectional jealousies, inflamed by a diversity of social relations—become elements of political strife.

I do not despair of the Republic; but as long as millions of money, under the disguise of official patronage, shall continue, as now, by the practice of the Government, to operate as a standing premium to successful faction, and mischievous agitation upon all subjects and questions of an inflammatory nature, I shall regard no part of our system as fixed, or settled upon a sure foundation.

I am no alarmist; I do not think myself subject to needless alarms; indeed, I feel no alarm as to any immediate results of a violent or revolutionary nature; but I would be faithless to the trust which I hold, if I failed to declare to my constituents my conviction that the times are eminently critical as to the cast of the great future which is opening upon the Republic. Whether that future shall be distinguished by uninterrupted domestic tranquility and a still advancing prosperity, or by discord, civil convulsion, and intestine war, will depend, in a high degree, upon the wisdom or the folly which shall mark the passing period. But whatever may come; whatever questions or conflicts may arise, in giving complexion to the future, the State of Tennessee, from her geographical position, and the character of her population—public-spirited, energetic, and resolute—can act no subordinate or unimportant part in the drama. I trust that her sons will consider well the course which it will become them to adopt in any exigency which may arise—that they will cultivate a spirit of harmony among themselves, and be prepared, when the occasion shall demand, to speak with one voice and one purpose.

I am no ultraist, and favor no extreme measures. A spirit of conciliation and forbearance is demanded by patriotism and the exigencies of the times, as well on the part of the South, as on that of the North; but there is a difference between a policy dictated by a spirit of forbearance, and a *quietism*, which may seem to approve, and would, inevitably, invite aggression.

JOHN BELL.

SPEECH.

FRIDAY, JULY 5, 1850.

The COMPROMISE BILL being still under consideration—

Mr. BELL continued, as follows:

Mr. PRESIDENT: Upon a careful consideration of the condition of the country at this juncture, and of the intrinsic difficulties of the deeply interesting questions now presented for our decision, I concur in the sentiment of the honorable Senator from Michigan, (General CASS.) I agree with him, that we have arrived at a point of time destined to form an epoch in our history; one, to which the future historian will refer, and from it deduce the causes of our decline as a nation, or, of increased prosperity and grandeur. But I fear I may weary the Senate.

SEVERAL SENATORS. "Oh, no!" "Go on!" "Go on!"

Mr. BELL. I do not know that I can say any thing further worthy the attention of honorable Senators; but I have had a desire to present some general views suggested by, yet not directly connected with the subject, which have appeared to me as deserving attention. I am so diffident, however, of presenting any views on what may be considered abstract, or merely speculative questions, after having already detained the Senate so long, that it would, perhaps, be as well to close my remarks here.

SEVERAL SENATORS. "Go on!" "Go on!"

Mr. BELL. I desired to corroborate the sentiment expressed by the honorable Senator from Michigan (Mr. CASS) on a former day. He said, that we had arrived at a period in our history constituting an epoch, from which future historians may deduce the causes of decline, or of increased prosperity. I agree with him. I am not sure that I do not consider the present a crisis of graver interest than, from his manner, I should suppose him to do. And if I could have the indulgence of the Senate in turning over a few pages of our past history, every one of which I regard as replete with valuable instruction, and each suggestive of matter sufficient for an elaborate speech, I should be much gratified.

I think, Mr. President, although some have said that there is no danger to be apprehended from the present condition of the country, and others have endeavored to create a panic, that there is danger, which ought not to be unheeded. I believe that the destiny of the Republic, for good or for evil, does depend, and in no slight degree, not only upon what we may now do, but also upon what we may fail to do.

Sir, no man who loves his country; no man who has any just pride in the reflection that he is an American citizen, but must desire that these dissensions should cease. For, sir, it is not a mere question whether we shall preserve the Union; for that may be, and yet prove no great boon either to ourselves or to posterity. The question is, not whether these States shall continue united according to the letter of the covenant by which they are bound together. It is, whether they shall continue to be united in heart; whether they shall continue to be practically and efficiently co-operative in carrying out the great ends of the association. The question is, whether mutual trust and confidence shall continue to animate and encourage mutual efforts in promoting and multiplying common benefits; or whether mutual hatred and distrust shall step in to check all progress; to distract and confound all joint endeavors for the common welfare; in fine, to entail upon the country all the evils of endless discord. That is the question. And when you present that issue to me, I say at once give me separation; give me disunion; give me any thing in preference to a Union sustained only by power; by constitutional and legal ties, without reciprocal trust and confidence. If our future career is to be one of eternal discord, of angry crimination and recrimination, give me rather separation with all its consequences. If I am to be at peace, let it be peace in reality; and if I am to be at war, let me know it at once, that I may put my house in order, and be ready to meet the consequences. So, sir, if I could dictate the course of Congress in the pending difficulties, I would say, let the adjustment be made in the real spirit of concession, compromise, and conciliation. Let us have some assurance that the promised harmony shall be permanent. Stay this agitation; allay this burning fever that threatens to consume the system. Terminate this painful suspense, which is more intolerable than an open rupture. If we of the South have made up our minds to yield nothing, to endure nothing; or if a better spirit actuates us, and we are prepared both to yield something and endure something, and yet, cannot bring our Northern brethren to any terms of just and equitable arrangement, and they will continue to vex and harass us, now and forever, let us resolve, and let them suffer us, to manage our own affairs in our own way. * But I trust it will never come to this issue.

Sir, to suppose that there is one member of this body who is not ready to sacrifice—to concede something of his individual sentiments and opinions to secure an adjustment of these questions—were he untrammelled by pledges, to which he may owe his position here, and which he may not violate without dishonor; to suppose that there is one man here from the North or the South, who is not prepared to sacrifice his individual views to the good of his country, were he free to do so, is to suppose him utterly unworthy of

the station he holds. To suppose that there is one member of this body who, upon a cold and selfish calculation of personal interest or advancement, would insist upon extreme issues, is to suppose him a wretch who does not deserve to live.

Still it cannot be disguised, that the questions to be decided are beset with difficulties and embarrassments on every side. Whatever way we turn, we are met by obstacles and opposing interests and influences. To state some of the more prominent of these interests and influences may be of use now, in our attempt to compose these distracting questions; and, if we should happily succeed in our efforts to give present quiet to the country, it may prove of some advantage to those who come after us, briefly to review the causes, remote and proximate, which have precipitated the present crisis.

I take the existence of the institution of slavery in a number of contiguous States of the Union, composing a somewhat distinct and compact geographical group or section, and the *non-existence* of any such relation or institution in an equal or greater number of States, constituting an equally distinct and separate group or section, to be the primary cause of the existing embarrassments and dissensions. But I shall assume this to be an inveterate and incurable disease of our system; one which cannot be eradicated or removed without absolute destruction. It was born in the system; it has grown up with it; and while the system itself lasts, for any thing we can now descry in the future, it must continue to give rise to occasional paroxysms of excitement and disturbance. The best we can do, will be so to accommodate the operation of the system to this inevitable condition of its existence, as to keep down inflammation.

From the nature of this inherent element of dissension, it will be readily perceived, that one of the most active influences to be encountered by the statesman who desires to preserve our system of government, is the spirit of fanaticism, religious and philanthropic. Another not less active, and more powerful for mischief, is the spirit of party and the rivalries and jostlings of personal ambition. Add to these, sectional jealousies; jealousies of sectional sway and domination; jealousies springing, in part, from economical considerations, naturally incident to a country of such vast extent and of somewhat distinct productive capacities and adaptations; jealousies of free and slave labor, incident to the distinct and different social relations in the two great sections of the Union—and we have before us a general outline of the causes which have produced the present disturbances, and of the obstacles and influences which exist to prevent any satisfactory adjustment of them.

I propose to trace briefly the operation of these elements of discord, during

a period in which many of the most distinguished men, now on the stage of public life, were conspicuous actors. I propose to confine myself as far as possible to a statement of facts; leaving Senators to make their own deductions and commentaries.

Mr. KING, (of Alabama.) As the day is oppressively warm, and the Senator seems much exhausted, I would suggest that he give way for a motion to adjourn, and he can continue his remarks to-morrow.

Mr. BELL. Not without the unanimous consent of the Senate.

The question was then taken on the motion of Mr. KING to adjourn, to which the Senate agreed unanimously.

SATURDAY, *July 6*, 1850.

The Compromise bill being again under consideration, Mr. BELL concluded as follows:

Mr. President, I am not able to express, in language, the deep sense of gratitude I feel to the Senate for the extraordinary indulgence extended to me on yesterday, in allowing me to close my remarks this morning. I shall endeavor to repay it, by condensing the views I propose to submit, at this time, within as small a compass as possible.

I propose now to resume the review of the operation of certain causes peculiar to our system, and of others incident to every republican or free government, which appear to me to demand the serious attention of the patriot statesman at this time, and of every one who holds any position of influence or authority in the Government—executive or legislative.

That there is a spirit of fanaticism at the North, religious and philanthropic, which closes the heart against all human sympathies not immediately connected with the particular object which, for the time, absorbs the attention of the subjects of it, cannot be denied. The characteristics of this species of fanaticism I need not describe. They are the same in every age and country. The rack, the sword, and the fagot, are the instruments which these fanatics are ever ready to employ, when left to themselves in the choice of means by which to carry out their plans of reform. It is this class of enthusiasts who would be willing to see every dwelling in the South in flames; every field stained with the blood of the master, in the execution of their phrenzied schemes for the emancipation of his slaves. We have no representatives of this class of fanatics in this Chamber, and happily their numbers are not formidable any where. There is another class of enthusiasts which cannot be justly called fanatical, but which exercises a far more extensive and mischievous influence. These are the subjects of a morbid sensibility; recluses—readers and authors of sentimental

literature, who cannot bear the contemplation of the inevitable ills and hardships of real life, without a shock to their nervous system. They sigh for a state of society into which wrong and injustice can never enter. Slavery at the South becomes the natural and favorite theme of the tongues and pens of these sentimentalists. In addition to these influences, it cannot be disguised that there is a deep and abiding anti-slavery sentiment pervading all classes at the North—even the more moderate and rational, who are devoted to the Union and would countenance no invasion of the constitutional securities and rights of the South.

But, the fanatics and sentimentalists of the North, with all the countenance they receive from the more just and sober-minded opponents of the institution of slavery, would not have been able to conjure up this storm, but for their alliance with other auxiliary and exciting elements—sectional jealousies, the interests of party, and personal ambition.

There is, Mr. President, a fanaticism of liberty, as well as of religion and philanthropy—a fanaticism exhibiting itself in theories which admit no distinction of races, and claims for all, a perfect equality, social and political; theories which reject all practical or useful schemes of government which have ever existed, or can be devised.

The French revolution gave the impetus to this species of fanaticism; and it is a curious fact that the war of 1812, without any forced deduction, may be considered as a remote consequence of the politico-fanatic spirit which prevailed at an early period of the Administration of General Washington—giving a strong coloring to those lines of party division then marked out, which continued to exercise a decided influence upon the affairs of the country for more than twenty years. It is another singular circumstance in our history, that this fanatic spirit of liberty, of trans-atlantic origin, became more widely diffused at the South than at the North. It is a well known fact that the Federal Constitution met with the most formidable opposition at the South, and chiefly upon the ground that the rights of the States and the liberties of the people were not considered as sufficiently guarded and secured by its provisions; while, its strongest support was at the North, where the ground was assumed, and more generally maintained, that a less vigorous government would be incompetent to secure the ends of rational freedom. Hence, the opponents of the new Constitution took the name of Democrats or Republicans; and its supporters that of Federalists. And when the causes of contention between Great Britain and the United States came to the issue of war, in 1812, the leading men of the country were arrayed for and against the war, mainly upon the principles which gave rise to the division of parties upon the adoption of the Constitution. The

Federal party sympathized with England in the commencement of her struggle with France, upon the assumption that it was a contest between law, order, and a vigorous practical government, on the one side; and of anarchy and licentiousness on the other. The Republican party, on the other hand, regarding the French as the champions of liberty and free government, and Great Britain as the upholder of despotism and regal authority, gave all their sympathies to France.

The opposite sentiments and opinions, thus imbibed by the great parties in this country, continued without change during all the changing phases of the protracted warfare between England and France. And thus it happened, that the war of 1812 had comparatively but few supporters at the North and East, where the Federal or English party, as it has been sometimes called, had its chief strength. The strong hold of the Republican, or French party, was in the South and West. Nearly all the leading champions of the war were from the slave States; nor could the popular war-cry of "free trade and sailors' rights" reconcile the section which then enjoyed the entire navigating interest, either to its justice or policy.

Well, sir, at the close of the war in 1815, the old Federal party found themselves entirely prostrate. The Republicans were triumphant everywhere. The elements of future party conflicts, however, were not then wanting. A host of influential chiefs, belonging to the dominant party, had established their claims to the public gratitude and confidence in the various branches of the civil administration during the war; but, among these, five gentlemen claimed pre-eminence—one from the East, (Mr. ADAMS,) three from the South, (Mr. MONROE, Mr. CRAWFORD, and Mr. CALHOUN,) and one from the West, (Mr. CLAY.) Each of these, as was natural in a free government, looked to the highest honors of the Republic as the proper rewards of his services. They all yielded priority, with what grace they could, to Mr. Monroe, a gentleman from Virginia, who had the *prestige* of revolutionary associations. Then came an almost unnatural lull in political strife, but it was not of long duration. Before the close of Mr. Monroe's first term, the Missouri admission question arose, when a gentleman of the Federal party, eminently distinguished for his talents and public services, was the first to invoke, in this Chamber, the spirit of fanaticism and sectional prejudice. He was eminently successful. The North, almost to a man, rose up at his bidding, and came into the support of his policy, in resisting the admission of any more slave States. Sir, some of the facts connected with this movement deserve particular attention at this time. There had been no previous agitation at the North. The movement was

sudden, spontaneous, and almost unanimous. The excitement became intense. Submission, on the part of the South, civil war, or a peaceable separation, seemed, for a time, the only alternatives; so fixed and obstinate was the anti-slavery sentiment at the North. Yet Missouri was and had been slave territory from the beginning. But this controversy, so threatening for a time, was adjusted by a compromise.

It has been said, in this debate, that in all the controversies between the North and the South, the North has had to submit to the terms dictated by the South. It is not true. The Missouri compromise was effected by the submission of the South—a submission which was regarded, by some, at the time, as fatal to the interests of the South; and it is now but too manifest that, if the interests of the South are of such a nature as to demand any thing like an equilibrium of power in the Confederacy, then was the time for the South to have stood by their rights; then was the accepted time, to have made an issue with the growing North. It was during the pendency of the Missouri question that we heard, for the first time, of *dough-faces*. The term was then applied to Southern as well as Northern gentlemen—Southern men with Northern principles.

Mr. CLAY shook his head.

Mr. DAWSON. It is true.

Mr. BELL. I make the statement on the authority of tradition and rumor only. But, however that may be, the South submitted; and Missouri was admitted as a slave State by the united vote of the South; and against the vote of nearly the entire North. Such was the potency of the anti-slavery sentiment at the North, in combination with sectional jealousy and the interests of party, at that period.

This storm hushed; soon afterwards came on the war for the succession to Mr. Monroe, between the illustrious champions of the Republican party, to whom I have before alluded, and then was reproduced an infuriate spirit of party, which has not ceased to afflict the country to this day. It was exasperated and rendered more furious by the unexpected and unwelcome appearance of a competitor, in the person of a celebrated military chief of the southwest, (General Jackson,) whose passionate energies were not likely to calm the elements of political strife.

Well, sir, Mr. Monroe out of the way, there were still five competitors in the field for the place of the highest dignity and honor: two from the South proper, (Mr. Crawford and Mr. Calhoun,) one from the West proper, (Mr. Clay,) one from the Southwest, (General Jackson,) and one from the East, (Mr. Adams.) There were four candidates from slave States, against one from the East and North. They were all members of the Republican

party; nor was there any distinct difference of political principle, or of sectional interest, in the contest between them. The old lines of party division had become nearly or quite obliterated, and consequently the leaders of the Federal party—a formidable, though conquered band—arrayed themselves in the canvass, each according to his personal liking or preference. It was almost, if not wholly, a contest of mere personal preference, among the people. It was soon perceived that the popular feeling ran strongly in favor of the military chief, and the youngest, but not the least powerful of the southern competitors, (Mr. Calhoun) yielded his pretensions to the first honor, as it was understood at the time, in favor of the hero of New Orleans. The contest came at last to be narrowed down between the champions of the East and Southwest, (Mr. Adams and General Jackson,) and by the favor of the great Western chief (Mr. Clay) and his friends, the star of New England shone in the ascendant. But there was no calm in the political elements. The struggle for final ascendancy became fiercer and rather more sectional. The followers of both the retired aspirants from the South (Mr. Crawford and Mr. Calhoun) took position on the side of the rising fortunes of the military chief; and, with the advantage of the admiration for the hero, on the second trial, General Jackson was borne into power, over the prostrate fortunes of the favorites of the East and the West.

The result of this contest has had a powerful and lasting influence upon the political history and condition of the country. An extraordinary degree of personal acrimony was engendered in a competition which turned chiefly upon personal preference and attachment on the one side; and personal antipathy and hatred on the other. These strong passions came to be mutual and reciprocal, as between the leaders and followers of both parties; and they increased in intensity, until, at last, the politics of the country were resolved into a principle of personal idolatry—a sort of man-worship, on both sides. A sentiment of loyalty to a chief, was substituted for patriotism and a regard for the interests of the country. The highest public interests were subordinate considerations; and the support of a favorite political chief, became the primary object in the party conflicts of the day. I wish I could say that this evil passed away with the conflict which gave it birth, and that it no longer afflicts the country. I need scarcely remind the Senate, that it was in this memorable conflict that was also engendered, by inevitable consequence, that ruthless spirit of indiscriminate party proscription, which continues to be the disgrace of American politics.

The state of things I have described was most inauspicious to a regular, harmonious, and constitutional operation of the Government; or, to a wise

and stable policy in any branch of the public interest or economy. Even before the close of the canvass of 1828, sectional interests were seized upon as grounds of future party divisions, and the means of acquiring or of securing personal pre-eminence; and the overthrow, after an uneasy reign of four years, of the only man from the North, who, in a period of near forty years, had been raised to the head of the Government, made a deep impression upon the North. His expulsion from power was the result, mainly, of a combination of the whole South against him; nor could he, nor could New England, ever erase that fact from their remembrance.

The natural fruits and consequences of this condition of the personal and sectional politics of the country, were quickly manifested. One of the first measures of public policy recommended by General Jackson, after he came into power, was the removal of the populous Indian tribes of the South, which had so long repressed the growth of the States of that section, to the vacant territory beyond the Mississippi. The question was not strictly a sectional one, for the same policy was in progress at the Northwest; yet it was sufficiently so, to invoke, for the second time, the spirit of fanaticism, and whatever of sectional jealousy could be brought to bear upon the question.

If honorable Senators will take the trouble to examine the files of old papers stowed away in the clerks' offices of the two Houses of Congress, they will find a mass of memorials, petitions, and remonstrances of women, as well as of men, bewailing Indian wrongs, and imploring the interposition of Congress in their behalf, quite as voluminous as those which, at a later date, have crowded upon Congress on the subject of African slavery. Nor will they find the debates upon that subject marked with a less degree of pathos and true eloquence—of fierce invective and denunciation of the proposed aggression upon the natural and equal rights of the Indians, than we hear now, from day to day, upon the subject of the wrongs of the African race in the South. And I will say to those gentlemen of the Senate, who have indulged in this strain, upon the question now before us, that they will find in those debates some choice flowers of rhetoric yet uncultured, with which, if they are disposed, they can adorn their future effusions.

But the overwhelming popularity of the new Administration, together with the community of interest existing, to some extent, at the North, in expelling the Indians from their ancient possessions, were an overmatch for the ravings of fanaticism, sectional jealousy, and the interest of party. The policy of Indian removal was permitted to triumph; and the story of Indian wrongs and oppressions has ceased, from that day, to create a sensation in any quarter.

The country, however, had but a brief respite from agitations of the most serious character. The new elements of faction and discord, engendered in the fierce conflict for supreme power which had just terminated, continued to develop their natural results. The action of the Government became violent and irregular. The extremes of passion, and the intensity of personal ambition, which had characterized the preceding canvass, had led to excesses in legislation. The tariff of 1828 was regarded as deeply injurious and oppressive to the South; and to add to the discontent in that quarter, General Jackson committed, what I thought then, and still think, a capital blunder. He dismissed from his confidence, and drove into opposition, the only remaining, but powerful Southern chief, (Mr. Calhoun,) and took under his patronage and training for the succession to himself, a gentleman from the North, but of very different character and pretensions. So far as the location of a successor was concerned, the policy was wise enough; but a more skilful and experienced statesman would have conciliated the two rival chiefs among his own followers; and so have balanced his favors between them as to have preserved their united influence in adjusting all the embarrassing questions likely to arise under his administration. The result of the opposite policy was, undoubtedly, to precipitate a crisis in public affairs, which threatened for a time domestic convulsion and the disruption of the Union. A sense of personal injury to a favorite chief was added to the sense of sectional grievance, which already existed at the South. The energies of a great intellect were concentrated in a great sectional movement. He was sustained by a band of devoted followers, who, for talent and all the elements of popular influence and control, have never been surpassed in this country. They succeeded in stirring afresh all the smouldering embers of original opposition to the Constitution in the South. The States of the North were represented, and believed by thousands, to be the exclusive beneficiaries of the system. The issue was essentially a sectional one; and then, I believe, for the first time, in the mutual criminalities of the North and the South, was the offensive and inauspicious question of the relative claims of free and slave labor to the fostering care of the Government, introduced into our public discussions. The controversy between the North and the South, at that period, was further aggravated, and the Union brought into imminent jeopardy, by the revival of an old theory—of the right of a State to nullify the legislation of the Federal Government; and, although that extreme remedy received the solemn sanction of but one State, and that not of the largest class, yet such was the appreciation of the disasters to the Union, which a resort to arms in maintaining the authority of the Federal Government in that single State, might

bring in its train, that a compromise was proposed and acquiesced in—a compromise which was, in fact, a defeat of Northern policy. The Southern movement against the protective policy was crowned with success.

Well, sir, the country had a brief repose upon the termination of this controversy; but the causes of future discord between the North and the South were deeply laid in the nature of the discussions which preceded the adjustment, and in the terms of the adjustment itself. Northern interests were felt to have been sacrificed to Southern dictation and exaction; while at the South, the sentiments of jealousy and distrust of the Northern policy continued unabated, and disaffection to the Constitution was more widely diffused. Unhappily, before the passions naturally connected with the late conflict between Northern and Southern interests had time to settle down, the slave emancipation movement commenced in England. The contagion crossed the Atlantic with electric speed, and the abolition movement at the North soon began to attract attention.

It is not my purpose to trace, in detail, the causes which have contributed to extend the influence of that movement; nor to inquire from what natural connexion and instincts the religion and literature of the North have lent their powerful co-operation; but there is one point connected with the growth of the abolition sentiment in that section, which I cannot pass over without some notice. For the reasons I have already stated, it may be conceived that the movements and designs of the abolitionists should tend to confirm, and add new converts to the theory, that Southern interests can never be secure under the existing constitution of the Union. The consequence was, that the mode of resistance resorted to by the Representatives of the South in Congress was rather calculated to inflame and strengthen the abolition movement, than to defeat its progress. It happened in this case, as in all others of great excitement, and where great interests are involved, that those who were most zealous and disposed to adopt the greatest extremes, controlled the more moderate and judicious. Assuming it as a clear proposition, that Congress had no constitutional power to abolish slavery in the District of Columbia, Southern gentlemen, in resisting the abolition movement, made their first stand, in opposition to the right of petition. This was, in my judgment, a mistaken policy in those who desired to repress agitation, or to defeat the designs of the abolitionists. The right of petition, upon all subjects, in popular estimation, has a traditional sacredness, in this country, which renders it dangerous to question or deny it in any but the clearest cases of abuse or misapplication. Hence it was, that thousands at the North, (a gentleman near me says tens of thousands,) who had never before countenanced the schemes of the abo-

litionists, first became their allies and coadjutors in defence of what they regarded as a sacred right; and when further irritated and excited by the continued opposition of the South, by an easy and natural advance, they became hearty co-operators in all their views. By this large accession to the ranks of the original promoters of the abolition movement, they were in sufficient force, in some of the States, to materially influence the results of elections; and the consequence has been, that the politicians in the ranks of the two great parties, ever eagle-eyed and ready to avail themselves of the support of every new ally, in their attempts to propitiate the favor of the abolitionists, imparted an importance and energy to their policy, which could never, under other circumstances, have been attained. From that time forth, at the South, as well as at the North, any alliance with, or opposition to, the cause of abolition by one or the other of the two parties, came to be carefully noted, and has been the fruitful source of agitation in all elections.

But the anti-slavery movement at the North had not acquired sufficient force to be felt in the election of the successor to General Jackson. Mr. Van Buren, it is well known, was borne into power upon the overwhelming tide of his predecessor's popularity; nor did the agitations upon this subject, north or south, have any material influence in the decision of the election of 1840, by which Mr. Van Buren was driven from power; but still, the sentiments of both himself and his successful opponent were carefully scrutinized. Mr. Van Buren, it will be recollected, expressed, in the course of the canvass, a decided opposition to the policy and purposes of the abolitionists; and so did his competitor, General Harrison. Nor is it probable that the anti-slavery movement would have acquired any mischievous influence, beyond the occasional abduction of slaves from their masters, on the borders of the slave and free States, and in the obstructions sometimes thrown in the way of the recapture of fugitives, but for the extraordinary series of events which followed upon the unfortunate demise of General Harrison. By that sad event, within a month after his accession to power, the Executive administration of the country fell into the hands of a gentleman from Virginia, (Mr. Tyler,) of whom I do not care to speak, further than to say, that, before the close of his term of office, he entertained the project of annexing Texas to the United States, either upon his own suggestion, or upon that of those gentlemen from the South who had acquired his confidence. The general, though by no means the universal sentiment of the slave States, was favorable to the policy of annexation, as a means of preserving that equilibrium of power between the free and the slave States, so often adverted to in this debate. And, of this idea of an equilibrium, let me say, that I think much more favorably than my friend from Illinois,

(Mr. SHIELDS.) If I had time I should like to elaborate this point; and I would substitute equilibrium for *compromise*, the favorite theme of so many gentlemen with whom equilibrium finds no favor. We have heard a great deal of the compromise of principles, opinions, and interests, which led to the adoption of the Constitution. Life itself, from the cradle to the grave, has been said to be a compromise, between good and evil. But when we speak of governments, equilibrium is a better word than compromise. No system of government, except a despotic one, can stand, unless some approximation to an equilibrium of interests and influences, powers and privileges, is established and observed. This is a condition, on which society, and voluntary associations of every form, depends. It is of almost universal application in physics as well as in morals. An equilibrium of forces and of contrary tendencies, is supposed to be the principle upon which the universe is upheld. So rigorous is nature, in her laws upon this subject, that some philosophers have conjectured, that a single atom displaced, would be sufficient to wreck a world. The fiercest and most angry forms in which nature exhibits herself, is the consequence of a disturbance of that equipoise of the elements of which the physical world is composed. So, in government, and especially in a government of moral forces and influences like ours—in a representative government, with universal suffrage—let the just equilibrium of interests and influences be materially disturbed; let a majority, without any direct interest, without traditionary reverence for our institutions, without national affinity or sympathy, ever decidedly preponderate—from that moment, the ballot-box, instead of a security, becomes an engine for the destruction of the existing rights and objects of society; and disorganization, social and political, or a government of physical force, become the only alternatives. It is for the North to look to this; it is for the North as well as the South, to calculate the value of this idea of a necessary equilibrium in governments. But this is a digression into which I have been led by seeing my friend from Illinois (Mr. SHIELDS) before me. I return to my narrative.

Mr. President, when I was tempted to a digression, I was remarking that the Southern sentiment was generally favorable to the project of annexing Texas, but it was not by any means unanimous. It is well known that a very respectable minority of the South, in view of the evils which they foresaw the success of the project would bring upon the country, were decidedly and strenuously opposed to it.

From the moment the policy of President Tyler and his Cabinet became public, it was foreseen that, in the ensuing contest for the succession, the project of annexing Texas would become a material issue between the rival

candidates. Of the Democratic party, there were, at that time, several leading gentlemen of the North who had their supporters and partisans for the nomination; but the favorite and most prominent was Mr. Van Buren, who had been rather unceremoniously thrust out of power at the close of a single term; and the general expectation was that he would be selected by his party. This gentleman, when called upon for his views on the question of annexing Texas, frankly declared his opposition; as did, about the same time, the distinguished Senator from Kentucky, (Mr. CLAY,) to whom the Whigs at that period looked with uncommon unanimity as their candidate. It is not for me to conjecture how it was, and by what management or influences, Mr. Van Buren was set aside by the Democratic convention which assembled at Baltimore in 1844, and a distinguished citizen of my own State was unexpectedly chosen as the Democratic candidate; but I may speak of what was soon afterwards announced to the public through the Democratic prints, and on the hustings, as the grounds upon which they based their hopes of success in the election; and from which we may infer, at least, one of the controlling considerations which led to that singular result. It was announced, that the annexation of Texas being made a cardinal point of Democratic policy, the united support of the South might be relied upon, in favor of the Democratic candidate. But, whatever may have been the effect of the twin policy of securing the immediate occupation of all Oregon, simultaneously announced, in reconciling the North to the policy of annexing Texas, it is certain, that the announcement of the new Democratic platform was received, in that section, with some surprise by both Democrats and Whigs. It was clear to the understanding of both parties at the North, that Southern influences and Southern management had controlled the nomination. A Southern candidate had been chosen, and all the more prominent gentlemen of the party at the North had been set aside. Well, sir, the force of party interests and discipline prevailed against all heart-burnings, and all jealousy of Southern domination; even against the anti-slavery feeling at the North. Not a single State, counted upon as Democratic, failed in its support of the Democratic candidate; and Mr. Polk was elected President of the United States.

There was one incident connected with this strange eventful story, so remarkable, that, though not strictly connected with the purpose of my narrative, I cannot omit to notice. It was said at the time, and I suppose truly said, that a considerable number of the abolitionists in New York were detached from the support of the Whig candidate, by the interposition of one or more of their leaders; but upon what construction of their duty and fidelity to their creed, I could never comprehend, unless upon the one avowed

at the time—which was, that the principles of Democracy, if faithfully carried out, necessarily lead to the abolition of slavery. I refer to this circumstance in the election of 1844 with no invidious purpose; nor by any means do I desire to say any thing offensive to my Democratic friends in this chamber; for I must do them the justice to say, that I have seen nothing in the course of their distinguished leaders here, to justify the imputation of abolition sentiments to them. I refer to it, to show that the doctrine of the perfect equality of rights, social and political, accorded to, and claimed for all races and conditions of mankind, by the principles of pure Democracy, as expressed in the favorite watchwords, Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity, is one of the distracting elements of the times, which the North as well as the South may well look to.

But, it is more to my purpose, to state, that the consummation of the policy of annexing Texas speedily followed the advent of Mr. Polk to power; and that, faithful to his engagements with his Northern friends, he prosecuted the claim of the United States to the whole of Oregon with a vigor which well nigh involved the country in a war with Great Britain. But that danger passed, and the possession of Oregon with its present boundaries secured—either from the necessities of his position, or upon some calculation of glory, or other and more substantial benefits to be acquired, he, unhesitatingly, and with the cordial support of his followers, north and south, plunged his country into a war with Mexico; indicating from the commencement, by circumstances unmistakable, that it would not be terminated without a further acquisition of territory. When that purpose became manifest to the public, it arrested the attention, and aroused the jealousy of the whole North. The annexation of Texas just consummated, accompanied by a stipulation for the admission of three or four slave States to be carved out of her territory; and then, following close upon the heels of that measure, a scheme for the further acquisition of territory in the same quarter, gave new activity to every anti-slavery sentiment and prejudice at the North; imparted increased fierceness to the spirit of fanaticism; revived every dormant passion of jealousy or resentment which had, in times past, been engendered by the triumph of the South over Northern men and Northern policy. The consequence was, an immediate and almost unanimous declaration of the free States, that whatever acquisition of territory might be the result of the war, should be *free* territory.

At the South it is well known, that while the Whigs were opposed both to the war itself and the policy of further acquisition, the Democratic party, north and south, were earnest in the support of both. But with what wisdom, or with what particular views of Southern interests, the acquisition of territory was insisted upon by Southern gentlemen, in the face of

the declaration of the North, that whatever might be acquired should be free, is yet a mystery to me. It is fair to presume, however, that a variety of motives had their influence upon the course of the Southern Democracy upon this subject; and, among others, party interests and considerations. The war, besides the vast resources of patronage which it had placed at the disposal of the Democratic administration, might be expected to give such a degree of *eclat* to the party identified with its success, as to secure its permanent ascendancy; but to terminate it, after such a vast expenditure of blood and treasure, with nothing to strike the imagination, or fix the popular admiration, except the glare of military achievement, might defeat all their expectations of continued party ascendancy. Another and more creditable motive, with many of the distinguished leaders, doubtless was, to give additional strength and protection to the slaveholding States; not doubting that the justice of the North, notwithstanding their repeated declarations to the contrary, would finally accord to the South a fair proportion of the new acquisitions, to be held as slave territory. But whatever may have been the motives of Southern gentlemen, the policy of further acquisition was insisted on and consummated; and the consequences are before us and around us, in all their magnitude and fearful bearings. A little more than two years ago we were in the midst of a sanguinary war with a neighboring republic. Now, at peace with all the world without, we are in the midst of a dangerous and hateful strife within, and among ourselves.

At the close of that series of measures and results concocted and set on foot by the Democratic convention in 1844, marked by the treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, the area of the Republic was perceived to have been enlarged, one-third, beyond its former extent. A vast region, of unknown and boundless fertility and resources, was supposed to be thrown open to the enterprise of our citizens; and, under the influence of the vivid prospects of future prosperity and grandeur, these amazing results—achieved in the short space of four years—painted to the imagination, the popular feeling, despite all forebodings and warnings of impending evil, rose to enthusiasm. Pæans were sung in honor of the foresight, the wisdom, and the energy of the authors of a policy, at once so grand and successful. The Democracy, north and south, congratulated themselves upon their brilliant achievements for the country, and upon the prospects of continued and permanent power, which dawned upon them. It was not long before they perceived that all their well-laid schemes of party aggrandizement were likely to fail them. Disaffection—open, undisguised, and formidable—showed itself in their ranks; and the Southern Democracy, especially, began to suspect, that in the acquisition of California and New Mexico, they had got what they did

not expect, and did not want—a vast accession of territory in which slavery was practically forbidden by the unalterable laws of nature, if not by human laws; and, so far as the preservation of an equilibrium of power between the North and the South was important to the protection of Southern interests, they found they had struck a blow which might prove fatal to those interests. They had insisted upon the immediate annexation of Oregon, and thereby provided for the future admission of two, if not four, new free States into the Union. California and New Mexico they perceived were likely to increase the preponderance of the North, by at least four additional free States; and how to retrieve this unfortunate result of the war and acquisition policy, is the problem to be solved by them; while the more momentous question is presented to the whole country, without distinction of section or political creed—how the Union shall be secured, in peace and harmony, against the peril, to which a mistaken policy, and the excesses of party, have exposed it.

I here close the review of the past, which I proposed. And if, in the sketch of the late acquisition of territory, I have seemed to press the idea, that the gentlemen of the Democratic party, and particularly those of the South, are chiefly responsible for the present embarrassing and dangerous state of affairs, I beg to say, that I have in view no party purpose. I have desired only to present a faithful outline of those causes of disturbance to our system, and of the present dissensions, which I had undertaken to do. The question now to be adjusted, and the interests to be protected and guarded, are too important to be made the subject of party calculations. I am a Southern man in interests and sympathy; and no true son of the South or Southwest can allow his party associations or interests to sway his judgment, or direct his course upon questions deeply affecting the common welfare; and, whoever may be responsible for the past, all must be responsible for the future. I have said, on a former day, that, to give content to the South, whatever might be my individual opinions of the value of these new Territories, and of the chances that slavery would, under any circumstances, be introduced into any part of them, I was prepared to have sustained the Missouri compromise, taken in its true spirit, as the basis of an adjustment of the pending questions. I have also said, and I repeat the statement, that, in my opinion, had such a proposition been presented and sustained by the leading advocates of the measure now under consideration, it could have been pressed to a successful conclusion. And, sir, let me say to my Northern friends, on this side of the chamber, that, though no special favor may seem to be due from them to those of the South, who, in defiance of the repeated protests of the North against the extension of

slave territory, insisted upon the acquisition of these territories; yet, to remember, that the policy of those acquisitions was opposed by a respectable portion of the Southern people; and, that many of the most leading Southern gentlemen, in Congress and out of it, foreseeing the evil consequences to the whole country, which would probably, if not inevitably follow, opposed themselves manfully and resolutely to the current of sentiment in the South, and resisted the annexation of Texas, as well as the acquisition of California and New Mexico. They may, also, well remember, that, without the co-operation of the North itself, these distracting questions would never have been heard of. The North, too, would, and did insist upon these new acquisitions. I cannot forbear further to remind my Northern friends, that, in the South and Southwest, there is a body of men who, for a long period, have continued faithful and just to them; sustaining them, in their favorite policy, through every vicissitude of political fortune; a body of men of liberal and catholic views of national policy, who look beyond the limited horizon of local interests, spurn the influence of sectional prejudice, and embrace the whole Union as their common country.

I am not to be deluded, Mr. President, by the appeals from the North, upon the subject of human wrongs and the violation of human rights. I am not to be misled, as to the true grounds of the anti-slave-extension policy of the North, by the fine sentiments so often expressed on the subject of freedom and the claims of humanity. I know, sir, that, however sincere and conscientious the anti-slavery sentiment at the North may be, neither the cause of freedom, nor a sentiment of humanity, is the active principle of the non-extension policy of the North. Were it proposed by the South to impose the chains of servitude upon a single human being now free, there is no man living to whom such a proposition would be more revolting than to myself. But, sir, humanity to the slave, not less than justice to the master, recommends the policy of diffusion and extension into any new territory adapted to his condition; and the reasons are too obvious to be misunderstood by the dullest intellect. No, sir, it is not a principle of humanity that dictates the anti-extension policy of the North. It is deeply founded in the ambition of sectional ascendancy; dictated, in part, by the jealousy of Southern influence and control, and the recollection of the long line of Southern chiefs who have succeeded to the Executive mantle. These are the interests and passions which, more than any others, have decided the policy of the North upon this subject. But, however natural and inevitable the existence of such passions and influences, under the peculiar circumstances of our system, let me invoke the forbearance of my Northern friends, if not their justice, by some consideration for

the passions and sensibilities naturally incident to the South, under the prospect of their declining power and influence in the Confederacy, which now stares them in the face. While that protracted domination of the South, which has been so long and so keenly felt at the North, was always more imaginary than real—no Southern man having ever attained the Presidency except by the concurrence of oftentimes more than half, and always of a large division of the North—yet now, it cannot be disguised that the period of Southern ascendancy, if it ever had a real existence, approaches its termination. Political power and ascendancy, in a sectional view, have, indeed, already passed away from the South, forever. And this is so manifest, that a Senator, who spoke in this debate, could not forbear taunting the South with the prospect of their declining fortunes. ‘A great change had taken place in the political vocabulary.’ “It is no longer,” he exultingly exclaims, “the *South* and the North; it is now the *North* and the *South*.” The South, Mr. President, needs not to be reminded by the triumphant North of her decayed power. And when the people of the South have, in prospect, the admission of eight or ten additional free States, in rapid succession, without the equivalent of a single slave State, the North should know how to excuse the restlessness of their Southern brethren; and feel no surprise that they should be looking around for some new guarantee—some additional protection, to their peculiar condition and institutions.

But, sir, as to myself, I shall hold fast to the Constitution until I shall see that it no longer interposes a barrier to absolute aggression; and I trust that some final adjustment of all these distracting questions will yet be devised and adopted, upon a basis so just and reasonable, as not only to stay the progress of disaffection, but to furnish to the world the highest evidence, that no diversity of local institutions, or of sectional interests, or any other cause of occasional dissension, will ever be so powerful for mischief, as to sunder the ties which now bind us together as one people.

Mr. President, I cannot conclude my remarks without taxing the indulgence of the Senate yet further, in saying a few words upon the subject of that institution, for the extension of which to the new Territories some gentlemen manifest so great a horror. It has been denounced in this debate as a great moral and political evil; as a grievous wrong and oppression to the race which are the subjects of it; a blight and a curse to the country which tolerates it, and a sin upon the consciences of the masters individually. To impart additional gravity to these denunciations, it is announced that the civilized world is arrayed against slavery. I am identified with this so much abused institution, by my representative position in this chamber, in association, in character, and in responsibility to the tribunal of public

sentiment. It is, therefore, natural that I should desire to take some brief notice of this accusing spirit of my Northern countrymen.

It is but justice to the section, in which this institution prevails, to state that, from the origin of the Government we now enjoy, there are and have been hundreds, not to say thousands, in that section, who have regarded the institution of slavery as contrary to the precepts of religion, and to the dictates of natural justice. To attest the truth of this statement, I need not invoke the testimony of illustrious names of the present, or of the past. It is sufficient to point to the numerous instances, at this day, in which slaveholders, in the full possession of health as well as in the article of death—the policy of the State in which they reside allowing the privilege,—emancipate their slaves, and often deprive their children of the patrimony which they had been taught to expect.

Now, sir, after these preliminary remarks, I proceed briefly to refer to the history of African slavery in the United States; its present condition; its effects upon the slaves themselves, and upon the country, of which it is so striking a feature.

For the purposes of my argument, the origin and progress of slavery in the United States may be briefly narrated. Without pretending to accuracy of detail, it may be stated with sufficient conformity to historical fact, that some century and a half ago, or a little more, a few thousand natives of Africa, in form and mind stamped only with the coarsest rudiments of the Caucasian race; scarcely bearing the impress of the human face divine; savage in their habits, both of war and of peace; ferocious as the wild beasts of their own native haunts, were caught up, transported to these shores, reduced to a state of bondage, and they and their descendants held in slavery until this day. But what do we now behold? These few thousand savages have become a great people—numbering three millions of souls; civilized; christianized; each new generation developing some improved features, mental and physical, and indicating some further approximation to the race of their masters. Search the annals of all history, and where do you find a fact so striking and wonderful; one, so worthy the contemplation of the philosopher, the statesman, the Christian, and the philanthropist? This great fact stands out boldly before the world; and in the impressive language of the Senator from Missouri, (Mr. BENTON,) it stands for an answer; and it must ever stand for an answer. Sir, it can never be successfully answered. Has humanity cause to drop a tear over the record of this great fact? Has Africa any cause to mourn?

But there are some other and subordinate facts, fairly deducible from the greater and more prominent one, which may likewise defy contradiction or

answer. The rapid multiplication and improved lineaments of this people, attest the fact, that the yoke of bondage has pressed but lightly upon them; and that they have shared freely, with their masters, of the fat of the land. Go, I repeat, and search the pages of history, and where will you find a fact comparable to this? The history of the Hebrew bondage presents no parallel—nothing so wonderful. The family of Jacob (the germ of the Hebrew nation) were of a superior race, and civilized. There is one singular analogy, however, besides that of bondage, which may be traced in the history of these two people. While the religious institutions of the one forbade any amalgamation, social or political, with their masters and surrounding nations; nature, by laws more stringent and inexorable, forbids to the other any equality, social or political, with the race which holds them in bondage.

What is to be the destiny of this singular people, now so rapidly multiplying in our midst; whether, as some suppose, at some future period, when their faculties shall be further developed and improved, and when subsistence shall tread too closely upon the heels of production, they shall become the sole possessors of the country which has been the scene of their toils—of their joys and their sorrows; whether they are destined to mark another great epoch in the history of mankind, by a second exodus; whether, under the lead of some second Moses, they are destined, as some imagine, to rise up with their little ones, and, after journeying for years over the intermediate space, to found an empire of their own in the measureless wilds of the great southern Continent; or whether, as others believe, with greater show of reason, by the aid of the amazing facilities of steam navigation, they are destined to cross the Atlantic, and to become the conquerors and civilizers of their now savage countrymen in the land of their progenitors, can only be known to the GREAT MASTER of all mankind—to Him who holds in his hands the destinies of all races and conditions of men, bond and free.

But, whatever the future may disclose, it is clear that this people are not prepared for any great change in their condition at the present time, nor at any approximate period.

As to the lawfulness or sinfulness of the institution of slavery;—whatever phrenzied or fanatic priests, or more learned and rational divines may preach; whatever they may affirm of Christian precepts, of moral and religious duties and responsibilities; whatever interpretation of the law of nature, or of Almighty God, they may announce; whatever doctrines or theories of the equality of human rights, and of the different races of mankind, diversified as they are by complexion, by physical formation and mental devel-

opment, infidel philanthropists, or the disciples of a transcendental creed of any kind, may hold or teach; however they may dogmatize upon this hypothesis, and declare it to be a violation of the law of nature, for any one race, with whatever superiority of mental or physical faculties they may be endued, to subjugate those of an inferior grade, and make them the instruments of improvement and amelioration in their own condition, as well as in that of their masters or conquerors, in carrying forward the great work of civilization—until we shall be enlightened by revelation from a higher source than themselves, I must claim the privilege of interpreting the law of nature by what I see revealed in the history of mankind from the earliest period of recorded time, uncontradicted by Divine authority. I must interpret that law according to the prominent facts connected with the subject, as they have stood out in the past, and as they stand out before us at this day. Looking through the eyes of history, I have seen slavery or involuntary servitude, the handmaid of Hindoo, Egyptian, Assyrian, Jewish, Greek and Roman civilization. I have seen the institution recognised by the theocratic government of the Jews,—the chosen depositaries of the WORD OF LIFE;—by democratic Athens, and republican Rome. I have seen, upon the overthrow of Roman civilization by the savage hordes of the north, that those new masters of western Europe and their successors, adopted, and continued to uphold the same institution, under various modifications, adapted to the changing condition of both slave and master, and still under an advancing civilization, until a comparatively recent period. I see the same institution tolerated and maintained in eastern Europe, at this day. I see the native race of all British India, at this moment, bowing the neck under a system of *quasi* slavery. But above all, I have seen here,—on this continent, and in these United States, the original lords of the soil subdued—some of them reduced to slavery, others expelled, driven out, and the remnant still held in subordination; and all this, under an interpretation of the law of nature, which holds good at this day among our northern brethren: and I have yet in reserve that great fact to which I have already alluded—three millions of the African race, whose labor is subject to the will of masters, under such circumstances that their condition cannot be changed, though their masters should will it, without destruction alike to the interests and welfare of both master and slave. These are the lights by which I read and interpret the law of nature.

Now, sir, permit me to say a few words upon the effects of this institution upon the country which tolerates it. To the great fact, to which I have more than once alluded, conjoined with the system of equal laws which our ancestors brought with them to these shores, perfected and consolidated

at the Revolution, and by the adoption of the present form of Union, we are indebted—the world is indebted, for that other great phenomenon in the history of the rise and progress of nations; a phenomenon, in all its bearings, not yet fully comprehended by the nations of the Old World, nor even by ourselves; and which, in all future time, will be the study and admiration of the historian and the philosopher: I mean, not the founding of a republic on these shores, so recently the abode only of savage and nomadic tribes, but its amazing growth and development; its magic-like spring, from small beginnings—rising, as it were, by a single effort, by one elastic bound, into all the attributes of a first-rate power; a great republican empire—able not only to maintain its rights of sovereignty and independence, by land and sea, against a hostile world; but, at the same time, by its example, shaking to their foundations the despotic powers of the earth; a great incorporation of freedom, dispensing its blessings to all mankind. Sir, the fabled birth of Minerva, leaping in full panoply from the head of Jove, if a truth, and no fiction, would scarcely be more wonderful, or a greater mystery, without the clue which African slavery furnishes for the solution of it.

Sir, making all due allowances for American enterprise and the energies of free labor, with all the inspiring advantages of our favorite system of government, I doubt whether the power and resources of this country would have attained more than half their present extraordinary proportions, but for this so much reviled institution of slavery. Sir, your rich and varied commerce, external and internal; your navigation; your commercial marine, the nursery of the military; your ample revenues; the public credit; your manufactures; your rich, populous, and splendid cities—all, all may trace to this institution as the well-spring of their present gigantic proportions;—nourished and built up to their present amazing height and grandeur by the great staples of the South—the products of slave labor.

Yet, slavery, in every form in which it has existed from the primitive period of organized society—from its earliest and patriarchal form to this time, in every quarter of the globe—and all its results—even the magnificent results of African slavery in the United States, are declared to be against the law of nature. Though contributing in a hundred varied forms and modes, through a period of thousands of years, to the amelioration of the condition of mankind generally; though sometimes abused and perverted, as all human institutions, even those of religion, are—still contributing to advance the cause of civilization; though, if you please, having its origin in individual cupidity, still mysteriously working out a general good;—yet slavery and all its beneficent results, are pronounced to be against the will of God, by those who claim a superior illumination upon the subject. This may be

so; but I must say that this conclusion, so confidently announced, is not arrived at, in accordance with the Baconian method of reasoning, by which we are taught, that, from a great many particular and well established facts in the physical economy, we may safely deduce a general law of physical nature; and so of morals and government. It seems to my weak faculties, that it is rather an arrogant and presumptuous arraignment of the ways of Providence, mysterious as we know them to be, for feeble man to declare, that that which has been permitted to exist and prosper from the beginning, among men and nations, is contrary to its will.

But whoever has studied, to much purpose, the history of civilization, the progress of society—of laws and government—must have perceived, that certain abstract or theoretic truths, whether in civil or religious polity, have been, and can only, with safety to the ultimate ends of all societies and governments, be unfolded by degrees, and adjusted at every step, according to the advance of society from its infancy to a higher civilization and a more enlightened comprehension—such as the equality of natural rights and privileges, the rights of self-government, and freedom of speech and opinion. These general truths, though they cannot be successfully controverted at this day, yet, as they have been seldom admitted, in their length and breadth, in the practical operations of government with success, some law-givers have been led to deny that they are founded in reason; and when they have, at any time, been suddenly embraced by the controlling minds among a people, the misfortune has been that they were applied in excess, and without due regard to the actual condition of the people who were to be affected: and hence they have, so far, failed of success in some of the most highly civilized nations of Europe. But it is more to the point to refer to the emancipation of the slaves of St. Domingo; one of the first explosive effects of the sudden recognition of the rights of man by the French people. It would be difficult to demonstrate, at this day, that the cause of humanity, or of human progress, has been, in the slightest degree, promoted by the abolition of slavery in that fertile and beautiful island. It is, I believe, now, pretty well understood, that British statesmen committed an error in the policy of West India emancipation, forced upon them by fanatical reformers. They were driven to adopt a sentiment, instead of practical truth, as the foundation of a radical change in the social condition of a people, who were not prepared either to appreciate or profit by it. Even the reformation in religion and church government, commenced some three centuries ago, in the opinion of many of the most profound inquirers, has failed of that complete success which ought to have attended it, for the reason that the general truths and principles upon which it was founded were applied in excess. The

zealous champions of reform, in throwing aside all ceremonies and observances which affect the senses, and in spiritualizing too much, there is reason to believe, have stayed the progress of substantial reform, and checked the spread of religious restraints upon the evil passions of men. But this is a delicate subject, and I must forbear.

These examples may show, that there are certain abstract truths and principles, which, however incontrovertible in themselves, like every other good thing, may be, and often are, misconceived and abused in their application. It is the business of statesmen, in every country, to apply them with safety, and to give them the utmost practical influence and effect consistent with the existing state of society. The most interesting illustration of this sentiment, and the most striking example of the superiority of practical truth over theoretic axioms, in the formation of government, to be found in all history—and one which claims the special attention of the people of this country at this moment—was exhibited by our ancestors, when, with their own recognition of the abstract truth of the equality of natural rights still vibrating on their tongues, they yet fearlessly set their seals to a covenant of union between these States, containing an express recognition of African slavery. I say *express* recognition; because, whatever the jesuitical doctors of the North may say, the clauses in the Constitution relating to the importation of persons under certain limitations, and fixing the basis of direct taxes and representation in Congress, I affirm, do amount to an express recognition of slavery.

But honorable Senators announce, that we have arrived at a period in the progress of society and of general civilization, when all these theoretic principles and abstract truths may be safely admitted, without restriction or limitation; when all races and conditions of the human family, within our borders, may be safely allowed a perfect equality of rights, social and political; that, as to African slavery, the period of universal emancipation is at hand; the shadow is already upon us, the handwriting is upon the wall—upon which the slaveholder may look and tremble. The honorable Senator from New York (Mr. SEWARD) undertakes to speak as a prophet; to announce, in advance, the decree of Heaven, and to call upon all people to hearken and obey. He presumptuously assumes that the will of Deity has been thwarted, in the constitutions of all societies and governments which have tolerated slavery in any form in times past; and that there can be no purpose of wisdom or beneficence on HIGH, in upholding it any longer. This may be so, sir; but, in my poor judgment, the time for these great and radical changes in the social and political condition of many of the nations of the earth, which we admit to be civilized, is not YET. But I believe the time will come, sooner or later, when the forty millions of Russian serfs

will break the sceptre of the Czar; strike off the manacles which now fetter them; assert the rights of freemen, and the privileges of self-government: but it does not appear to me, that the time is yet, when all these privileges can be conceded to them with safety to their own welfare. So, sir, I suppose, that at some future period the hundred millions of Hindoos, now subject to British rule, may emerge from their thralldom, improved to some degree of competency for self-government. But, sir, I have little hesitation in saying that, whatever may be the seeming or actual oppressions under which that people groan at this time, the advantages they derive from the introduction of European civilization, and the restraints imposed by a vigorous and enlightened government, are more than an equivalent for them all.

And, sir, the time may come, when the three millions of slaves in the United States will be free; but it is not yet. When and how this great change in their condition shall take place, I do not pretend to foresee; but, I have an abiding confidence, that when that time shall come, our system, under the continued protection and favor of a beneficent Providence, will pass that ordeal, and every other to which it may be subjected, in safety; and for ages, in the far future, continue to dispense its blessings to millions of grateful and prosperous freemen.





WERT
BOOKBINDING
Grantville, Pa.
Jan - Feb 1988
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